ABOUT YOUR ORAL PRESENTATION

The in-class group presentation serves several purposes. First, it provides students who are not good writers or test-takers with an alternative means of expressing what they know. Second, it is a good opportunity to practice collaborating on a group project. Third, many students have not had much experience with public speaking or are very nervous when called upon to speak in front of a group; the oral presentation will provide valuable experience speaking in front of a small group, and help students overcome their nervousness or “stage fright” in a supportive atmosphere. Finally, it provides experience in focusing on one aspect of a topic, organizing materials in a concise way, and verbally communicating that information to others. Here are some tips for a successful, non-stressful presentation:

1) Start your research well ahead of time. Part of putting together a presentation is thinking about and mentally digesting the information you find in your research. You can't do that if you're still gathering information the night before or the morning of your talk. Consult with the other members of the group and decide who is responsible for what.

2) You have less than 15 minutes for the whole presentation, so don't try to cram too much information into the time allotted. Narrow your group’s topic down to one that can be dealt with effectively in 10-12 minutes. If you need help, schedule an appointment or ask questions via e-mail (ecovey@u.washington.edu).

3) Props are not absolutely necessary, but are sometimes helpful. The most useful prop is Powerpoint slides. Demonstrations can also be very effective. The sorts of props that don't work well are ones that are too small to see from the back of the room, or ones that must be passed around the room. When designing Powerpoint slides, make sure that the print is big enough for someone at the back of the room to read, but not so big that it overpowers your audience. Don't put too much material on a single slide! A rule of thumb is that you should have no more than one slide per minute.

4) If possible, start your talk off with an example from your own experience, a joke, or a demonstration of some sort. If the class shows interest in what you're saying, or laughs and is in a good mood, that will help you relax and will propel your presentation forward.

5) Once you're ready, rehearse the talk ahead of time. You can rehearse your part individually in front of a friend or family member. You group could also get together and rehearse collectively. Time yourself! The main reason for rehearsing is to make sure that you aren't trying to cover too much material for the time allotted. It is more common for inexperienced speakers to try to cover too much material rather than too little. However, it often happens that inexperienced speakers rush through their material so fast that the audience is unable to process it, and the presentation is cut short. Try to find a happy medium.

6. If your presentation contains names or words with which you are unfamiliar, learn how to pronounce them (and their meaning, if they are not proper names). If there is information that you do not understand, either figure it out or omit it from your presentation.

6) If you use written notes, try not to read from them. If English is your native language, you should need no more than an outline of what you want to say, and this can be on your
Powerpoint slides. If English is not your native language, you may want to write out exactly what you want to say so that you can read it if you have to, but try to speak naturally to the extent that you can.

7) To minimize pre-performance jitters, eat something before you come to class so that you're not hypoglycemic. Get some exercise as close as possible to the time of your talk (go for a walk or a run, etc., and get your mind off the presentation). Make sure that you have plenty of time to get to class so that you're not feeling hurried. If you're not on first, try to relax and concentrate on other people's talks while waiting for yours (I know that’s hard).

8) Stand up and face the people you're talking to. Don’t sit. Don't look down at notes the whole time. Speak loudly enough so that you can be heard in the back of the room.

9) If you start feeling uncontrollably nervous at any time before or during your talk, close your eyes, consciously relax your body, and take three complete deep breaths. No one will notice, I guarantee.

10) Remember - it's only a few minutes. You'll be surprised how quickly it's over!